

Sermon title: Remember and Rejoice
Text: Matthew 3:13-17; Acts 10:44-48
By: Rev. Terry Carty
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Place: Kingston Springs UMC
Season: Baptism of the Lord Sunday; First Sunday after Epiphany

The baptism of Jesus is a truly remarkable event – well worth taking a whole worship service to celebrate and reflect. According to Matthew, John the Baptist could not believe Jesus was asking John to baptize him! John did not feel worthy of untying Jesus' sandals, but to baptize him?

This was just the opener for Jesus' ministry that would present God's kingdom in a whole new light: the least are blessed and those are enabled to bless others. So Jesus said "Let it go John. This is the way it should be for us to fulfill all righteousness."

At the end of the baptism, three signs from God show that God was inaugurating something new and doing it through Jesus:

1. The heavens are opened, a sign of significant revelation about to come from God.
2. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus as a dove, a sign of new creation.
3. And a heavenly voice says, "This is my son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased."

The baptism of Jesus was itself another epiphany, an appearance of God in our midst.

Since the time of the disciples, Christians have been baptized as a sign of what God is doing in their lives and as a ritual of initiation as brothers and sisters of Christ.

Just over a month ago, Peggy Deal helped us prepare for Christmas when she told us of her baptism in the Jordan River. We all felt strangely warmed when she said that since that time, every day has been Christmas Day for her.

I find that every recollection that someone has of their baptism or the baptism of someone they love holds the same mystical power.

When my family moved from Chattanooga to Nashville I was entering the 5th grade. I don't know why I asked to be included in the Membership Class at the new church because I had done membership class in my old church and had gotten my membership certificate in the Methodist Church. But something moved me to want to go through it again.

At the end of the class the preacher was asking who had been baptized as babies and who would be baptized as believers when they joined the church. I said I wanted to be baptized. The preacher reminded me that I was already a member. I had to do some tall talking to convince him that I wanted to be baptized – my mother was raised Baptist and

she told me I was 'christened' not baptized. He agreed to do it. I think that was the first time that I had a real sense of the presence of God's Holy Spirit moving in my life.

Now, I am going to go out on a limb. Today, I would like to invite some of you who have stories of your baptism to briefly tell us all about it – and tell us what it means to you. Some of you have told me some things about your baptisms. Please be courageous and share that same spirit with all of us...

After sharing:

There was a time when we might not have experienced the miracle of our own baptisms. The first Christians were Jewish and would not extend baptism to Gentiles. The story in Acts just preceding the passage that was read tells of a dream that the disciple Peter had of great hunger and the lowering of a large sheet full of birds, reptiles, and other animals for him to eat. These were considered unclean by the Hebrew law, but in his dream God fed him on the unclean animals.

When the Cornelius and the other Gentiles called on Peter to bring them the Word from God, Peter understood that God wanted the whole world to know Jesus Christ. That day he ordered the Gentiles to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

And so, when we remember our baptism, it is not just a memory of water dripping off our hair. It is a memory of Jesus who told John it is right for John to baptize him. It is a memory of a sign made by Peter that showed God's grace was being showered on the whole world. It is a memory that we are part of the kingdom of God – blessed so that we are enabled to bless others.

Give instructions for Reaffirmation of Baptism.